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Creek Restoration Benefits Wildlife and Ranch



Wildlife living along Las Flores Creek near Los Alamos will benefit from a project recently completed to prevent large-scale erosion of the creek channel and banks at five sites on a private ranch. The project is a cooperative effort of federal and local conservation agencies and the landowners, Darwin & Jeanette Sainz.

With a grant of \$115,350 awarded by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the non-profit Land Trust

for Santa Barbara County coordinated the project in the east branch of Las Flores Creek. The project sites occur in part of the creek that spans both the Sainz Ranch and an adjacent parcel owned by Chevron USA. The work involved the replacement or repair of five old concrete grade control structures, along with reshaping eroding creek banks and restoring native vegetation.

“The ranch owners benefit by preventing damage to their rangeland and roads due to these old, failing erosion control spillways, and at the same time downstream habitat for sensitive species is protected,” notes Land Trust executive director Michael Feeney.

The Land Trust partnered with the Cachuma Resource Conservation District to design and secure construction permits for the project, with engineering services provided by Pacific Engineering Associates of Santa Maria.

“The voluntary actions of the Sainz family, coupled with their ability to recognize what we share in common, make this project a success and highlight the important role of private landowners in the conservation of listed species and all wildlife,” said Diane Noda, Field Supervisor for the Ventura Fish & Wildlife office.

Las Flores Creek flows from the Solomon Hills along U.S. 101 near Los Alamos into San Antonio Creek, which then flows through the Barka Slough and continues through Vandenberg AFB to the ocean. The creek is in the area identified as habitat for the federally endangered California Tiger Salamander, and the watershed supports other federally protected species including the California red-legged frog and the unarmored three-spined stickleback.



Without action to repair the cracked and eroding grade control structures, large scale failure could result in large volumes of sediment flow down stream which could degrade or destroy habitat for the above-mentioned federally listed species, as well as damage ranch roads, fencing and grazing land.



Grading and concrete work at the sites was done by Carlton Cooper Excavating & Grading of Los Olivos. The Cachuma RCD has planted willow stakes to help stabilize the creek banks and will monitor the sites to ensure vegetation grows on the regraded slopes.

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The Land Trust for Santa Barbara County (www.sblandtrust.org) works to conserve and enhance our county’s natural open land and agricultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations. Founded in 1985, LTSBC has negotiated voluntary conservation

transactions with landowners that have protected over 17,400 of ranch, farm, wildlife habitat and community open space land.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

